

DDRESS delivered at the CELE-
BRATION of the TWENTY-
FIFTH ANNIVERSARY of the
FOUNDING of the MILITARY ORDER
of the LOYAL LEGION OF THE
UNITED STATES. By BREVET MAJOR-
GENERAL CHARLES DEVENS, in the
Academy of Music, PHILADELPHIA,
April 15, 1890.



P.

ADDRESS.

COMPANIONS OF THE ARMY AND NAVY, — I congratulate you that we are assembled in such full numbers to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the formation of this Order. Survivors of many a hard-fought battle and many a desperate day, you come alike from the long marches and fierce conflicts which gave us possession of the South and West, from the banks of the Cumberland, Tennessee, and Mississippi, from the narrower, yet not less terrible, field where the Army of the Potomac fought out finally to the bitter end its bloody and protracted duel with the Army of Northern Virginia, and from every field made red by heroic strife. The mountain ranges, the deep bayons, the rich and broad plains, the mighty rivers of the fairest portion of a continent, attest your constancy and valor. Time as well as war has been generous to you in this, that for a quarter of a century it has permitted you to enjoy the just regard of a nation and the full fruition of your deeds. For this bounteous gift let us render the homage of grateful hearts.

We are fortunate in the place where we assemble.

The city of Philadelphia was the capital of our Revolutionary era. Here was proclaimed the birth and independence of the United States. Here, too, was framed that Constitution which is the crowning glory of the Revolution. The peace with Great Britain, in 1783, had left us without a settled government and the discords of jealous States had already appeared. The years that immediately followed were filled with profound distrust and anxious forebodings. The convention that met here in 1787 made of these States a people and a nation. Where should those who offered their lives to defend that Constitution meet more happily or more proudly than in the city in which it received its birth?

Nor ought we to forget that in the hour of the Rebellion this city lost none of its ancient reputation for patriotism. Its gallant sons were among our earliest and bravest soldiers; its generous contributions, its sanitary commissions, its Christian commissions, its cordial supplies of provisions to the soldiers going to or returning from the front, its unflinching care of the sick and wounded, are embalmed in sacred remembrance. We whose residence is to the north and east had from our position the largest share of this lavish hospitality. One who has been through here, as I have been, with a hungry regiment, and seen every man bountifully fed, or has come, as I have come, a wounded soldier, and known the bounty of its citizens and the skill of

its justly renowned surgeons, may certainly speak with something like personal feeling.

The Military Order of the Loyal Legion had its inception on that saddest day, at the conclusion of the Civil War, when humanity throughout the world was shocked by the death of Abraham Lincoln. In honor of that illustrious memory and of the great cause for which we had fought, in recognition of the affectionate friendships which had been inspired among the officers of the army then about to disband, in historic recollection of the Society of the Cincinnati which had embraced the officers of the Revolutionary Army, it was determined to form this Order; and at a meeting of a few officers in this city the initial steps were that day taken for its organization. It was the first of the military societies which followed, or rather accompanied, the close of the war. I do not intend to pursue the details of its history, except to say, that when some time later the society of the Grand Army of the Republic was formed, intended to comprehend all of whatever rank who had honorably served, no antagonism was created to this, nor was any reason seen why, in its more limited sphere, this might not also be properly maintained. To the Grand Army of the Republic we have always fully and cordially accorded as its rightful place the position of the great representative society which includes and gathers into itself every association of that whole American army

which subdued the Rebellion. That society has extended wide its generous and open-handed charity; it has cherished the noblest patriotism; and if there are those of this association who are not also members of that, I urge them respectfully to join its ranks, and to give to it their cordial support in its purest and highest aims.

Of the officers who listen to me, many, almost a majority, have carried the musket and the knapsack in the ranks, and are justly proud that they have won their way by their own ability and determination. To some the possession of high military qualities may have given command; yet in all armies rank and promotion are often the result of circumstance and opportunity, and thus accident contributes to success. It was especially so in our own, springing as it did from the ground at once in answer to the call of an imperilled country. Long and faithful service to many a man brought only the proud consolation of duty nobly done, of sacrifice generously offered, and of that self-respect which one may well maintain, even in the humblest home. As I would speak to-night of all our armies as but one, so would I speak of those who composed it as but a single body of men. Side by side on many a field won by their valor, no useless coffins around their breasts, but wrapped in the blanket which is the soldier's martial shroud, officers and men await together the coming of the eternal day. Side by side

those more fortunate, who have returned, have returned with equal claims to the regard and love of those for whom they fought. When one has done his whole duty, so far as his title to respect is concerned, it can and ought to make no difference whether he did it with the stars of the general or the eagles of the colonel on his shoulder, or in the simple jacket of the private. The fame of every general, even in the highest rank, must depend largely on the men whom he leads. However far-reaching and sagacious his plans may be, it is still by strong hands and stout hearts that they must be carried out and results achieved.

When we consider how little adapted the education of the American citizen is to that system of discipline which is intended to make of the soldier a machine, in order that the physical strength and power of thousands may be wielded by the will of one alone; when we remember how prone we all of us are to criticise the acts of others, or their orders and directions, — we realize how difficult it must have been to yield that unquestioning obedience which is the necessary rule of the military service. Yet how generously they gave their confidence, how nobly they strove, sometimes in disaster, often under the most trying circumstances, to execute the orders they received — to one who held any command the wish must often have come that he could have led them better and done more full justice to their merits.

Companions, we meet not merely for a few hours of social enjoyment, nor alone to renew our friendships formed, although many of them were when the death-shots were falling thick and fast; we meet also to reassert our devotion to the great cause of the Constitution and the Union; we meet to honor the memories of those who bravely died in that righteous cause, or who have passed from our side in the years that have followed, and to dedicate ourselves anew to country, and to the great principles of liberty and justice.

In the long annals of wars with which earth has been filled, it would be difficult to find many less justifiable than the War of the Rebellion. The flimsy dogma of the right of a State to secede from the Union at its own will and pleasure, and assert its sovereignty against that of the government of which it formed a component part, was a pretence only by which the leaders of the slave States sought to disguise their project of erecting an empire whose corner-stone was to be (to use Mr. Vice-President Stephens' own words) the system of slavery.

Had any one in Philadelphia in 1787 uttered the gloomy foreboding that every State might withdraw from the Union at its own pleasure, and that the Constitution had thus provided its own dissolution, his fears would have been scouted and laughed to scorn. He would have been told this Union is not one of States, but of the people of all the States — so it is

expressly declared; as such alone can it be accepted. It was a necessity of the task that the framers of the Constitution had before them that the government they had met to form should include two classes of States. Nor did the difficulty appear to them so formidable as it afterwards proved. Fresh from their own struggle for liberty, they could not but be conscious that this system was utterly inconsistent with the principles upon which a free government must rest; yet they fully believed that it would die out and drift silently away. It was not thus to pass away — but in the wildest of storms and tempests that ever raged on sea or land; but now that it is gone, earth and sky are fairer than before.

Without dwelling on the various phases of the protracted controversy to which this system gave rise under the influence of men who were willing to sacrifice the Union to its perpetuity, the failure to make of Kansas a slave State, and the election of Mr. Lincoln, had settled that there was to be no more slave territory added to the Union. Madly resolved to rule or ruin, those who controlled the public opinion of the South determined to dissolve the Union. No real grievance existed, but imaginary ones could be trumped up. No right of the Southern States was invaded, or even threatened. The President-elect had solemnly pledged himself to protect them in every right; nor could he if he would have done otherwise; as while they remained, his administration would have

an adverse majority in both houses of Congress which they could substantially control. But his election was made at once the occasion of secession by the cotton States, which stood, however, alone during the anxious winter of 1860-61. The Union feeling was still strong in the States that lay north of them, and they were as yet reluctant to take the decisive step. Something must be done to involve them, something to "fire the Southern heart," as the phrase of the day was, and to induce them to make a common cause; and then the tempest of shot and shell was let loose upon Fort Sumter. The experiment had the success which was anticipated, and a success which was not anticipated; for if the Southern heart was fired, so was the Northern also. How majestic was that uprising, how former political differences were forgotten, how strongly all felt that the great tie of American citizenship was above all party, — I do not need to remind you. There were not wanting those, aghast at the gulf of fire that seemed opening before us, who said, let the "wayward sisters go in peace"; there were not wanting others, who, deeply sensible of the evils of slavery, were ready to grasp at the opportunity of separating from the States which tolerated it. The loyal head of the country was wiser, the loyal heart of the country truer, than this. As the startling news flew from city to city and village to village, east and west, that our flag had been insulted and trampled upon, and the integrity of our government assailed,

the stern tones of the answer of the people always came back, "The United States is a nation competent to assert its own sovereignty, and to subdue and punish traitors." To them the Union was not a rope of sand to be blown about by every breeze, or washed away by a summer sea, but a chain whose golden links were strong as adamant. Forged in the fire of that great strife which had finally separated us from the most powerful nation on the earth, it was clear that if the Union were once destroyed, all hope of erecting any stable government upon its ruins must for the time be abandoned. The conflicts of discordant States were before us, grinding against each other their bloody edges in fierce contentions, which, like the wars of the Saxon Heptarchy, would be worth no more to the advancement of the world than the wars of the Kites and Crows. Nor if two distinct confederacies could have been framed, was permanent peace between them possible. Two great systems of civilization were front to front and face to face. The conflict in arms, to which we had been summoned by the cannon which bombarded Fort Sumter, was indeed irrepressible. It was a necessity of empire that one or the other should conquer. Rich and broad as the continent is, with its great gateways on the Atlantic and the Pacific seas, it was not broad enough for both.

It was a great elemental struggle, where the differences had their origin in the foundations of

society itself. There are times in the history of nations when the conduct of its wars may be left to its regular forces; yet no such time had come to us. It was a war of the people, waged, unhappily, against a portion of the same people, yet not the less in obedience to the plainest principles of justice and right. Nor let it ever be forgotten that although the leaders of the Rebellion were successful in drawing into it most of the States of the South, there were true men everywhere who never yielded and never faltered in their allegiance. If I could properly give a warmer welcome to any above others, it should be to the gallant soldiers of Kentucky and Tennessee, of Maryland, West Virginia, Missouri, and other States of the South, who came to rejoice our hearts and strengthen our hands.

It was in the feeling of the most exalted patriotism that the national army was formed, and the men who composed it embraced all that was purest and bravest in the young life of a nation. Counting all the cost, recognizing all the danger, the path of duty before them was plain, and they followed it. No doubt the blood of youth was high in their veins, and they looked forward not unwillingly to the stern joy of the conflict; but love of country was still the great moving principle which actuated them. It is not a penalty, it is a just responsibility, that a government founded by a people should look to them for its legitimate defence. Certainly, I would speak

neither to-night, nor at any other time, any words of harshness or unkindness individually of those with whom we were lately at war. There is no body of men more anxious to be at peace with all their countrymen than are the soldiers of the national army; there are no utterances more cordial in favor of a generous oblivion and forgetfulness than are theirs; but they cannot, and they ought not to, forget that the cause for which those who opposed them stood was gravely wrong. It is the cause for which our brave have died that forever sets them apart among the myriads who people the silent cities of the dead. Let us be generous to those with whom we had to contend, but let us be just to our own. We willingly do honor to their courage and valor, but those high qualities have sometimes gilded with a false light causes which cannot command the approval of the world or bear the clear, white light of time. We know the allowances which must be made for erroneous beliefs, for mistaken education, for old associations, for the example of others, even for temporary feeling and passion. Let us make them freely. Yet, when all are made, neither the living nor the dead of a great and holy cause can be confounded with those who fell in the wretched struggle to destroy a nation or erect a system of government false to the great principles of liberty. Their cause, as well as ours, is rapidly passing into history. Before that great tribunal we are ready to hold up our hands and

plead and answer. Nor shall we fear that its verdict can be otherwise than that it was the cause of order against disorder, of just and righteous government against rebellion, of liberty against slavery. If it be less than this, then was Mr. Jefferson Davis the patriot he has been somewhere lately eulogized, and we, and the brave who offered their lives with us, but successful traitors.

It is not for us here to review, even in the most cursory way, the events of that tremendous struggle. Such would be the office of the historian, not of the casual speaker. The problem before us we underrated in the beginning, nor since have we taken the credit which is fairly due for overcoming its difficulties. To conduct a war over such an extended territory with success, to seize and hold its strategic points in the midst of a hostile and warlike population, to maintain the lengthened lines of communication for armies operating far from their base, was an enterprise unparalleled in its demand for men and resources. That the contest must broaden into one for the liberty of all men, and that the plague-spot which had troubled the peace of the Union must be cut out by the surgeon's knife, was obvious from the first. The year 1862 stands forever memorable as including one of those events whose occurrence marks the opening of a new era, and show that the great bell of time has struck another hour. "I had made a solemn vow," says Mr. Lincoln himself, "that if Gen-

eral Lee was driven from Maryland I would crown the result by a declaration of freedom to the slaves." That vow was faithfully kept, for on the Monday which followed the information that the battle of Antietam was won, this was issued, to be followed on January 1 by the more formal proclamation which declared all persons to be free within the insurgent States, stating the act to be demanded by military necessity, and invoking upon it "the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God." Such an act was, from its very nature, irrevocable. On that day the shifting sands of concession and compromise passed from under the feet of the American people, and they planted them firmly on the great rocks of liberty and justice to all men, to be moved therefrom, we will believe, no more forever.

The succeeding year witnessed the splendid victory of Gettysburg, which, accompanying the fall of Vicksburg, marks definitely the culminating point of the conflict by the joint triumph of the Eastern and Western armies. Although the waves were to come again and yet again, no wave was to come higher than that which was dashed back in clouds of broken, dissolving spray as it struck the iron wall of the infantry of the Army of the Potomac. The causes of the movement of the Confederate army into Pennsylvania were never fully stated by General Lee. He intimates distinctly in his report that others existed than those of a purely military character. Without doubt, among

them was the hope to break something of the force of the impending fall of Vicksburg, which, grasped in the iron embrace of Grant and the Army of the Tennessee, must soon surrender. A victory won on Northern soil would do this. It is the good fortune of the patriotic State in which we stand that it contains within its borders not only this memorable field, but that its fame is allied to the victory by the memory of three of its most illustrious commanders. The calm and judicious Meade, whose wisdom brought about the encounter in which the enemy was obliged to attack, and in which the Army of the Potomac was able for once to stand on the defensive; the splendid Hancock, the idol of the Potomac Army, whose fiery words and majestic presence infused into all around him something of the courage of his own daring heart, are gone to-day. They lived long enough to be assured of the honor and love in which they were held by their countrymen; but on the field, and at the head of the First Corps, died Reynolds, then as always unassuming, modest, brave, contributing nobly to that victory whose fruits he was never to enjoy. Yet where could man die better than in the defence of his native State, his life-blood mingling with the soil on which he first drew breath? The fourth of July, 1863, was the proudest day which up to that time the Union arms had ever known, for the cannon which ushered in a nation's natal day were mingled with those which told through the North

the victory of Gettysburg, and were echoed and re-echoed from the West and South along with those which in thunder tones announced that Vicksburg had fallen, and that the Mississippi ran "unvexed to the sea."

The terrible year of 1864 was yet to come. The control of all the armies was to pass into the hands of General Grant alone, and to be directed by his single will. The west of the Alleghanies was secure under the direction of Sherman, and as he made his great march from Chattanooga to Atlanta, and from Atlanta to the sea, the conflicts of the Army of the Potomac with its formidable opponent were to be renewed again and again on such desperate fields as the Wilderness, Spottsylvania, and Cold Harbor. In the spring of 1865 that great army moved to its last series of battles, and the surrender of Appomattox followed. The sword of Lee was laid in the conquering hand of Grant, and the War of the Rebellion was over. Henceforward no shot was to be fired in anger, and the surrender of the other armies of the Confederacy followed. No executions, no harsh punishments were to mark its close; yet under God the Union had received a new birth of freedom, and, purified by the fires through which it had passed, had risen grander and more august among nations.

Silently as snow-flakes melt into the sea, the men who composed our armies passed into the general life of that community which they had saved; yet not as

drones or idlers, but to carry with them into the occupations of peace the honors of courage; fidelity, and patriotism, which they had earned on the grim fields of war. Their bugles will wake no more the morning echoes as they salute with their reveille the coming day; the descending night will hear no more the rolling tattoo of their drums; their cannon long since have uttered their last note of defiance or of victory; yet impartial history shall record that no army was ever assembled with higher aims and loftier purposes, none more ardent with the sacred flame of patriotism, none more calm and resolute in disaster, and none more generous and forgiving in victory. So long as the flag that it bore at the head of its marching columns shall wave above a free and united people, it shall be remembered with gratitude that in its day and generation it did for this country deeds worthy of immortal honor, and that the army that preserved is worthy to stand side by side with the army that achieved the liberty of the Republic.

The material evidences of the conflict pass rapidly away. The earthworks with which the land was covered sink to the level of the surrounding soil, and scarp and counterscarp meet in the ditch that once divided them. So let the evil feelings it engendered fade away. It is marked definitely only by the great amendments to the Constitution of the United States. That these embody more than its fair results; that they are intended to do more than to state in a definite and

permanent form the principles of justice, freedom, equality before the law for all men; that they should be fully and generously obeyed, — cannot be seriously contested. The victory gained was for the South as well as the North. Already in agriculture, formerly almost her only source of revenue, her production has vastly increased; while the opening of mines, the development of manufactures, the rise of great towns and cities where formerly existed but scattered hamlets, attest the inspiration she has caught from freedom. Year by year, as time rolls on, she is destined to feel the influences of that steady force which is impelling the country forward, nor will she lag behind in the march of peace and prosperity.

Companions, while we have a right to rejoice in all that brave hearts and strong arms have won, no occasion that draws together those who survive of the armies of the Union can be one of unmixed joy. With proud memories come also those that are grave and sad. Nor if I recall those who are gone before us, would I do so to diminish one jot or tittle of the pleasure of our present gathering, but rather to ennoble and dignify it. I would remember them as each one of us would wish to be recalled in the hour of dearest mirth and of social enjoyment, when hand clasps hand in friendship and mutual esteem. There are no words which can render a just tribute to those whose deeds are their true eulogy; there is no honor too high for those who gave their lives

willingly rather than that a single star should be obscured on the mighty shield on which are emblazoned the arms of the Union.

Nor do you need to be reminded how many have passed away since the war, and how steadily the fierce artillery of time is doing its work. Close up the ranks as best we can, we are an army to which there come no recruits. Generous as is this gathering at our Twenty-fifth Anniversary, how few can expect to join in its Fiftieth! Without doubt there will be some who will with more feeble voices seek to raise the ringing cheer with which we once answered the rebel yell, even if soon they too must yield to the common lot of man. The chiefs of this organization, the predecessors of its present commander, who I trust may long be spared, — General Cadwallader, that model of a gentleman and soldier, the splendid Hancock, the fiery and impetuous Sheridan, — all are gone. Yet let me not mention names, lest by mentioning some I might seem to omit others equally worthy, save the great name of Grant alone. He was the Commander of all the Armies, and to his trumpet-call each one of us has answered, and to him it was given to end our great strife with a victory which enabled him to exclaim, "Let us have peace!"

How many are missing to-day at the roll-call you know but too well. Even if our voices may falter and our utterance choke as the name of

some honored chieftain who has led us rises to our lips, or of some dear friend, it may be, who has shared our mess, we recall them in honor, and not in sorrow. So would we remember all, not alone the great chiefs who urged forward the onset of mighty battalions, but the humblest, faithful soldier who did his duty manfully. Wherever those gallant spirits have passed to their long repose, — whether they sleep in the bayous of the Mississippi, or by the waters of the Potomac, the Cumberland, or the Tennessee, in the tangled wild-wood, or in the shadow of their own homes with the monumental marble high above their breasts, — all in memory are welcome here. “The whole earth,” says Pericles, “is the sepulchre of illustrious men,” and our mountains seem to lift their heads more loftily for the brave who lie upon their crests, and our rivers to move to the sea with a prouder sweep for those whose life-blood has mingled with their streams: —

“ They fell devoted but undying;
 The very gale their names seems sighing,
 The waters murmur of their name,
 The woods are peopled with their fame,
 The meanest rill, the mightiest river,
 Roll mingling with their deeds forever.”

Nor, companions, in this hour do we fail to remember him, not a soldier indeed, but to whose military capacity, developed by years of anxious study, tardy justice is just beginning to be done, who was, by the

Constitution, the commander of its army and navy, the then President of the United States, — him upon whom the faith of all, citizens and soldiers, old or young, rich or poor, alike, had rested secure during those terrible years, and whose own heart was large enough to embrace in love and charity all that people over whom Providence had placed him to be their ruler and guide in the supreme hour of their destiny. Twenty-five years ago to-day he passed from the ranks of living men, yet each year has added to that pure and splendid fame. Every record, every newly discovered act or letter which loving industry brings to light, but serves to reveal how kind and good, how wise and great he was.

On the day after its capture, when he visited Richmond, it was my own good fortune to ride side by side with him in the headquarters' army-wagon, which conveyed him through the streets of that city so long the citadel of the Confederacy. He seemed weary and tired, graver than I had ever seen him, less rejoicing in the triumph that had been won than anxious about the new problems looming up before him. It may be that I interpret the recollections of that hour in the baleful light of the dreadful tragedy that so soon followed; yet, as I recall it, he seemed to me like one who felt that his life's work was done, and who would willingly rest from his labors, that his works might follow him. The ways of Providence are not always ours; it may be that it was

decreed that this great life should end in the very hour of victory by the assassin's hand, because it was seen by a wider vision than we possess that to that life of self-sacrifice and patriotic devotion, the noblest close was that which has invested him forever with the martyr's crown. It is not always to those who achieve success that its temporal enjoyment is granted; the reward of high heroic souls is in their own sense of duty performed, of trial and sacrifice resolutely endured, in the consciousness that others will reap all for which they have bravely striven. In the older Scriptures the stately figure of the great Hebrew law-giver and warrior stands on the lonely hill in the land of Moab to gaze out over the Promised Land, which it is decreed he shall never enter. Fair before him stretch the fertile fields, yet no crops from them shall ever fill his garner. The sparkling waters dance in the sunlight, yet no draught from them shall ever refresh his weary lips. He has crossed at the head of the children of Israel the stormy waters of the Red Sea; he has led them through the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. For them the hour of enjoyment has come; his work is done; for him it remains but to rest in his lonely grave. So to this our Moses, who had led us through the Red Sea of rebellion, is vouchsafed but a glimpse of the Promised Land, as he passes from mortal sight forever.

"Beautiful upon the mountains," says the prophet

Isaiah, "are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings." Yet as the messengers approach we see that their countenances are grave, that their garments are worn, that their feet are torn by the flinty way; but beautiful are they still for the glad tidings which they bear. And as in imagination there rises again before us the tall figure of Abraham Lincoln, not graceful according to the rules of classic art, yet not without its own simple majesty; as we behold again that rugged countenance, deep graven with the lines of princely care, we see it illumined with a nobler light than the cunning hand of the Greek could give to the massive brow of the Olympian Jupiter; beautiful in the radiance of truth and justice, while the scroll that he holds in his strong right hand bears the glad tidings of liberty to all men.

Companions, my brief task is ended. In the conflict and in the years that have followed, half of what were once our numbers, it is probable, have passed the barrier that separates the seen from the unseen world. They are the advance of that army of which we are the rear-guard. Somewhere they have halted for us, somewhere they are waiting for us. Steadily we are closing up to them. Let us sling on our knapsacks as of old, let us cheerily forward in the full faith that by fidelity to duty, by loyalty to liberty, by devotion to the country which is the mother of us all, we are one army still.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 012 187 007 1